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ABSTRACT

A survey was sent to the entire institutional membership of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges in spring 1975 in order to ascertain the extent of honors programs available for two-year college students of exceptional ability. Of the 1,270 institutions surveyed, 644 responded (51%). Results of the survey showed: (1) 47 of the responding institutions had honors programs with formalized academic and administrative structures; (2) the bulk of institutions indicated that while they did not have formalized academic and administrative honors programs, they did have honors elements, such as honors classes, honor societies, colloquia, independent study provisions, or financial aid based at least partly on achievement; (3) 125 institutions indicated that they had neither formalized honors programs nor honors elements; and (4) institutional size appeared to have little effect on whether or not a formal honors program or honors elements were available for students. The author concludes that the development of honors opportunities for gifted students in two-year colleges is a relatively new phenomenon and fledgling attempt to educate one constituency in an extremely heterogeneous student population. Tabular data are included throughout the report and a bibliography is attached. (Author/JDS)

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A Statistical Portrait of Honors Programs in Two-Year Colleges*

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A Survey of Honors Programs in Two-Year Colleges: Abstract

Michael A. Olivas

This paper surveys curricular programs for honors students in two-year colleges, examines administrative patterns for such programs, and details the student services available for honors students. Formalized programs or honors provisions in over 460 AACJC institutions have been analyzed; programs for gifted students are profiled in Tables by size and range of honors elements. The data indicate a FTE configuration for honors programs and there is evidence that institutional size has little effect upon honors opportunities.

A SURVEY OF HONORS PROGRAMS IN TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

Though two-year colleges purport to provide the flexibility required to educate students of varying abilities and interests few academic programs can provide assistance both to students who require remedial attention and to those students who need enriched programs because they are not challenged by the regular curriculum. This paper will survey those curricular programs for students of exceptional ability in two-year colleges, examine the administrative patterns for such programs, and detail the auxiliary student services available for participants in honors programs.

In spite of the plethora of statistical data available on two-year colleges and their students, there is scant literature on those institutions' honors programs for gifted students. A 1967 attempt to survey honors opportunities fell short when only 11 of the 270 polled two-year colleges reported honors provisions.[1] Reasons for the lack of research on honors programs may be the varying and amorphous definitions given "honors" or a vague uneasiness about possible overtones of elitism that would be inimical to community, junior, or technical colleges.

This paper attempts neither to justify nor apologize for the concept of honors, but rather to document provisions made for students of higher-than-average ability in two-year colleges and to identify honors opportunities that have been incorporated into present two-year curricula. In view of the minimal evidence that honors programs are widespread in two-

year colleges, it is necessary to study formal and informal programs for the superior student. This survey will determine to what extent the colleges have committed their resources to such programs.

METHOD

The data were gathered by a three-page questionnaire sent to the entire institutional membership of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges in Spring, 1975. The AACJC is the national coordinating body of over 1200 two-year colleges in the United States, Canada, and U.S. possessions; its membership represents community colleges, junior colleges, technical colleges, branch campuses of four-year colleges, extension centers, and other non-baccalaureate postsecondary educational institutions. Thus, a survey of its membership would cast a wide net over two-year colleges of many types. The response rate was 51%, or 644 returns in two mailings to 1270 institutions. While a higher rate is desirable, this 51% sample of the universal set includes a negligible unusable return rate (8 unusable, or .01%,) and detailed responses from schools of 47 states. Moreover, all the types of member institutions are included in the sample, as well as enrollment counts in institutions ranging from 24 students to over 10,000 FTE.

FINDINGS

Table 1

Profile of Return Sample, (N=636; 644 minus 8 unusable)
FTE

	<1000	1000-8000	8000>
Have Formalized Honors Program (47-7.4% of Sample N)	18	23	6
No Formalized Program, Honors Elements Available (464-73%)	171	251	42
No Formalized Program, No Honors Elements Available (125-19.4%)	54	64	7
636	243 (38%)	338 (53%)	55 (9%)

The sample includes 243 institutions with a FTE of less than 1000 (38%), 338 institutions (53%) with a FTE between 1000 and 8000, and 55 institutions (9%) with a FTE greater than 8000. Presidents (or appropriate designated staff) were asked to indicate whether or not their institution had "a formalized honors program." Responses were corroborated in a later section requesting information on the precise academic nature of the program. Using as a criterion whether or not the program had academic and administrative formalization, it was determined that 47 institutions (7.4%) had honors programs. The FTE breakdown for formalized programs was 18 (38% of formalized programs) for schools with less than 1000 FTE, 23 (49%) with 1000-8000 FTE, and 6 (13%) with more than 8000 FTE.

This .38-.49-.13 distribution was skewed slightly towards the largest schools in the sample FTE distribution of .38-.53-.09.

The bulk of institutions indicated that while they did not have formalized academic and administrative honors programs, they did have honors elements (cf. Table 3) for those students who demonstrated superior ability. These 464 institutions (73% of sample) fell into FTE categories of 171 (37%), 251 (54%), and 42 (9%); these FTE category percentages replicate almost exactly the larger sample FTE figures (.38, .53, .09).

Indicating that they had no formalized honors program, 125 institutions noted that they had no honors elements available. The FTE categorization of these schools is 54 (43%), 65 (51%), and 7 (6%), skewed slightly from the total sample (.38, .53, .09) towards institutions with a FTE less than 1000.

These data seem to support the thesis that the size of the two-year institution has little effect upon whether or not a formal honors program is available, or upon whether or not honors elements are available for students. There is the slight indication that the percentage of small schools (less than 1000 FTE) without any program or elements for honors students is larger than the percentage of small schools in the entire sample; this appears to be corroborated slightly by the skew of large schools (8000+ FTE) having honors programs.

This difference could possibly be attributed to financial constraints of small schools or to the reason offered by one academic dean of such an institution without any honors opportunities: "Since our student body is small (350), we have little need for honors sections to individualize studies. All our classes are, in a sense, honors classes."

Table 2

Profile of Institutions Having Formalized Honors Programs (N=47)* incomplete returns in parts

Mean enrollment (N=39)- 57.8 (range 3 to 250)

Administration
Place in Administrative Structure (N=43)
Within Student Affairs- 5 (12%)
Within Academic Affairs- 38 (88%)
Budget
Yes- 17 (36%) (range $200 to $32,000)
Funds to buy faculty time- 5 (11%)

Curriculum
Honors classes, independent study, contractual learning- 47 (100%)
Speakers- 12 (26%)
Examination Credit
CLEP, AP- 32 (68%)
Departmental, life experience- 23 (49%)
Honor Roll-4 (8%) # question not asked in survey

Student Services
Financial aid based on grades, at least in part- 19 (40%)
Coordination
High schools- 12 (26%)
Employers- 2 (4%)
Four-year colleges- 12 (26%)
Honor Society- 26 (55%)
Honors Advisory Committee- 24 (51%)

Forty-seven institutions, 7.4% of the total sample, indicated that they had formalized academic and administrative honors programs. To be sure, no statistical table can adequately portray a cross-sectional, prototypic program. This difficulty is in part due to the wide degree of latitude in formulating honors programs and in part due to the varying sizes of the programs and schools. The mean honors enrollment is 57.8 and ranges from 3 to 250. In order to validate honors program claims, the questionnaire had internal checks to elaborate administrative, curricular, and support structures.

Of the 43 institutions reporting on administrative structures and the governance of honors programs, 5 (12%) reported that the office was subsumed under student affairs and 38 (88%) reported it to be under academic affairs. Only 17 programs of the 47 (36%) reported that budgets were available for honors use; the amounts varied from $200 to $32,000 and included 5 schools that were able to "buy" honors faculty time either by disbursement of funds or by release time from duty.

All 47 institutions had formal honors classes, honors sections, independent study provisions, tutorials, colloquia, contractual learning, or some form of curricular flexibility for students of above-average ability--this being one of the survey's conditions for a formalized program. Additionally, 12 (26%) reported that funds were available from various sources for guest speakers, a form of curricular enrichment. Examination

credit appeared to be firmly entrenched in the colleges, as 32 (68%) accepted CLEP or AP standardized tests and 23 (49%) offered departmental examinations for credit. These included various challenge exams, placement credit, credit for military, and previous work experience credit.[2] Although the question was not included in the survey, 4 schools indicated an honor roll or dean's list was available to recognize capable students. If the question had been included, undoubtedly the response would have indicated a larger number of such recognition devices. While several schools considered their dean's lists as "honors programs," the institution was not included in Table 2 unless the requisite curricular and administrative structures were evident from the other sections of the survey.

Student services in the honors programs included auxiliary structures as financial aids, inter-institutional cooperation, student honors organizations, and honors advisory committees. In 19 schools (40%) financial aids were available to applicants who qualified, at least in part, based upon academic achievement. Need and employment were other factors cited in several instances. A question concerning inter-institutional cooperation provided a small insight into how the honors program related to area high schools, employers, and four-year colleges. Twelve schools (26%) indicated that they had coordination "to a great extent" with area high schools, 2 (4%) with employers, and 12 (26%) with colleges. Phi Theta Kappa--a two year college national honorary society--and other local or national societies were

noted by 26 schools or 55% of those schools with formalized honors programs.[3] Honors advisory committees that included students, faculty, and administrators were cited by 24 schools, or 51%.

Table 3

Profile of Institutions with No Formalized Program, But Honors Elements Available (N=464)

Honors classes, independent study, contractual learning- 153 (33%)

Speakers- 34 (7%)

Examination Credit
CLEP, AP- 330 (71%)
Departmental, life experience- 235 (51%)

Honor Roll- 77% (16%) # question not asked

Financial Aid Based upon Grades, at least in part- 114 (24%)

Inter-institutional cooperation
High Schools- 19 (4%)
Employers- 7 (2%)
Four-year Colleges- 12 (3%)

Honor Societies- 215 (46%)

Honors Advisory Committee- 32 (7%)

Since the FTE distribution of these 464 schools resembled the distribution of the total sample (N=636; cf. Table 1), and since there were varying degrees of honors involvement in the sample, Table 3 does not break down the institutions into FTE categories. Nevertheless, this Table details the largest

category of the total sample (73%; cf. Table 1) and could be reasonably viewed as protypic of the universal set of all two-year-colleges.

The institutions in Table 3 prove interesting when compared to those formal programs detailed in Table 2. The formal programs far outstrip informal programs in the three key areas of honors classes (100% to 33%), financial aid (40% to 24%), and standing committees (51% to 7%); informal programs more resemble formal programs in the areas of examination credit, where informal programs had a slightly higher percentage of CLEP or AP credit (71% to 68%) and departmental or experiential credit (51% to 49%). Several institutions noted that committees to study honors for possible implementation were being formed; such study groups could lead to formal honors programs or extension of honors elements.

Even though three schools in Table 3 noted discontinuation of formal honors programs, all three retained honors elements either in administration, curriculum, or student services. Mobility is possible from Table 2 to Table 3, or dismantling of formal programs into ones with informal elements. One could also predict with reasonable certitude the mobility of schools from Table 3 to Table 2, or informal to formal programs. Less likely is a movement from Tables 2 or 3 to Table 4, that of two-year colleges with no honors programs or honors elements.

Table 4

Profile of Institutions with No Formalized Program, and No Honors Elements Available (N=125)

FTE less than 1000- 54 (43%)
FTE 1000-8000- 64 (51%)
FTE greater than 8000- 7 (6%)

Table 4, a derivative of Table 1, is presented in order to assign each sample group a Table and to emphasize the slightly skewed resemblance to the total sample FTE curve (.38, .53, .09). It could also be used to establish a base of institutional data in order to further study honors elements in Table 4 institutions. The questionnaire requested respondents to indicate whether or not there was a formal honors program in their school, and <u>if not</u>, to indicate those elements offered to students of superior ability. Although the 125 colleges completed all institutional data, it cannot be ascertained whether or not the questionnaires were read thoroughly and all possible honors elements marked. It is probable that some of the two-year colleges that listed no formalized honors programs or honors elements in fact do offer credit by examination, independent study, or other curricular elements for students who demonstrate ability. If this is the case, one would expect the sample size in Table 3 to swell in proportion to its FTE configuration.

Table 5

Profile of Honors Elements, (cf. Tables 2, 3: N=511)
Formalized and Not Formalized

Sample Having Honors Elements- 511 (80% of total sample, N=636)
Classes- 253 (50% of Table 5, N=511)
Speakers- 60 (12%)
Examination credit
  CLEP, AP- 398 (78%)
  Departmental- 284 (56%)
Honor roll- 85 (17%) # question not asked
Scholarship aid based, in part, on grades- 154 (30%)
Cooperation
  High schools- 45 (9%)
  Employers- 11 (2%)
  Four-year colleges- 38 (7%)
Honor Society- 270 (53%)
Committee on Honors- 83 (16%)

SUMMARY and CONCLUSIONS

In a comprehensive survey of AACJC member institutions, 47 two-year colleges (7.4% of return sample) indicated formal administrative and curricular structures existed for honors students. In the return sample, 511 institutions (80%) noted the presence of one or more honors element in their school's curriculum or student services structures. The most frequently-cited honors opportunities included honors classes, examination credit, scholarship aid, and honor societies. There were 125 institutions (19.4%) in the sample that listed no honors programs or elements in their institution. These data

noted no correlation between the establishment of honors programs in two-year colleges and institutional size, as the total sample FTE distribution curve is approximated by that of the Formalization Profile (Table 1).

Study is needed on major issues concerning mean enrollment in formalized programs, expenditures for honors administration, and selection of honors students. The research tool must be calibrated to measure expenditures, salaries, and funding formulae among several allocation models before meaningful statistical data can be generated. An important issue that requires analysis is identification of honors students and predictive criteria for college success.[4] Also worthy of further exploration is the evolvement of honors opportunities for students in technical or career programs. Future research, particularly comparative case studies, could be evolved from this survey's baseline data. Of particular note will be the .38-.53-.09 FTE configuration derived from these data, and whether or not such a ratio will be consistent in subsequent research.

Honors programs are firmly entrenched in four-year colleges and universities, but the development of honors opportunities for gifted students in two-year colleges is a relatively new phenomenon and fledgling attempt to educate one constituency in an extremely heterogeneous student population. The mandate of two-year colleges to cultivate all available talent by extending educational opportunity to all who seek it suggests that there are no entangling precedents to preclude the development of honors programs if they be warranted.

FOOTNOTES

[1] M. Jean Phillips, 'Honors Programs in Higher Education Today: An Overview, 1967," Forum on Honors(National Collegiate Honors Council), 3(February 1973), 13-15, 18.

[2] For a detailed study of life experience credit, see Charles W. Meinert and Sherry Penney, "Credit for Life Experience: Establishing Institutional Policy and Procedures," Journal of Higher Education, 46(May/June 1975), 339-48.

[3] A study of Phi Theta Kappa students and their academic records at baccalaureate institutions to which they have transferred suggests that two-year college honors students are successful transfer students. See Raymond E. Schultz, "A Follow-Up on Honors Students," Junior College Journal, 38 (December 1967/January 1968), 9-15.

[4] Cf. Lanora D. Lewis, "Honors Programs as Preparation for Graduate Study," The Superior Student(Inter-University Committee on the Superior Student), 7(May/June 1965), 19-21, for a discussion of predictive criteria for college achievement.

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